

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE
CENTRAL RAILROAD OF NEW JERSEY AT TREICHLER, PA.,
ON NOVEMBER 23, 1929.

February 21, 1930.

To the Commission:

On November 23, 1929, there was a side collision between two freight trains on the Central Railroad of New Jersey, at Treichler, Pa., which resulted in the injury of two employees.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Lehigh and Susquehanna Division extending between WK Tower, at Allentown, Pa., and Mauch Chunk, Pa., a distance of 27.59 miles. In the vicinity of the point of accident this is a double-track line over which trains are operated by time-table, train orders, and an automatic block-signal system. There is an eastbound passing siding located between the two main tracks; this passing siding begins at Lockport telegraph office and extends a distance of 5,106 feet eastward to a point 175 feet west of Treichler. The point of accident was at the fouling point of the eastbound main track with the east end of this passing siding. Approaching this point from the west, there is a compound curve to the left which is 1,936 feet in length, with a maximum curvature of 3° , followed by 2,367 feet of tangent track, the accident occurring at the leaving end of this tangent. The grade is 0.13 per cent descending for eastbound trains. There is a spring switch at the east end of the passing siding, the normal position of the switch points being for through movements on the main track. Under special time-table instructions, trains may trail through spring switches without operating the switch stand.

EAST

-2-
Point of switch

Treichler

Point of frog and approximate point
of accident

Insulated joints

Signal 1002

Engineman could
see signal 1002

3°
623'

2°20'
1313'

4603'

Rear of train
CU-2

Lockport Telegraph Office

No 1591
C R R of N J ,
Treichler, Pa.
Nov 23, 1929

Signal 1004

WEST

SDA

The signals involved are signals 1004, located 37 feet west of the switch at the west end of the passing siding, and signal 1002, located 4,603 feet east of signal 1004, or 553 feet west of the switch at the east end of the passing siding. These signals are of the 3-position, upper-quadrant, normal-clear, semaphore type, signal indications being red, yellow, and green, for stop, caution, and proceed, respectively. Signal 1002 can be seen by the engineers of an eastbound train a distance of 1,841 feet. The insulated joints at the east end of the passing siding are located 256 feet west of the switch points, and not more than 60 feet from the fouling point with the eastbound main track.

The weather was clear and dark at the time of the accident, which occurred at 5.56 a.m.

Description

Eastbound freight train CU-2, consisted of 28 loaded cars, 55 empty cars, and a caboose, hauled by engine 909, and was in charge of Conductor Harrison and Engineman Kline. On its arrival at Lockport, this train was headed in on the passing siding at 5.33 a.m., and after the departure of eastbound passenger train No. 102, or about 5.51 a.m., the required permission was received from the train dispatcher, by means of the telephone at Treichler, to again occupy the main track. Train CU-2 started ahead, and was pulling out on the main track at a low rate of speed when struck by train TJX-6.

Eastbound freight train TJX-6 consisted of 80 loaded cars, 5 empty cars, and a caboose, hauled by engine 923, and was in charge of Conductor Long and Engineman Murtha. This train passed Lockport telegraph office at 5.55 a.m. and collided with train CU-2 shortly afterwards, while traveling at a speed estimated to have been approximately 30 miles per hour.

The indications were that the first car struck by the engine of train TJX-6 was the third car in train CU-2, that car being carried eastward a distance of about 140 feet. The second car in train CU-2 was demolished, and the first car overturned, while the engine of that train broke away and ran down the track for some distance without being damaged, the side of the fourth car of the train was slightly damaged. Engine 923, of train TJX-6, came to rest in an upright position about 440 feet east of the point of accident, in a badly-damaged condition.

The first nine cars and the forward truck of the tenth car in this train were derailed, some of them going down an embankment on the south side of the track.

The employees injured were the fireman and the brakeman of train TIX-3.

Summary of evidence

Head Brakeman Dugan, of train CU-2, was in the caboose when his train stopped on the passing siding between Lockport and Treichler stations. He then went ahead and was at the station at Treichler when train No. 102 left that point. After its departure, he called the dispatcher on the telephone, received permission to follow train No. 102, and immediately gave his enginemen a proceed signal, without opening the switch. This signal was acknowledged by the engineman, and the movement was started. Head Brakeman Dugan was standing near the station on the left side of the track, waiting to board his engine as it passed him, and at about the time his train started, he saw the headlight of a train approaching on the eastbound main track. He did not know how far away it was located at that time, saying that his view had been interfered with to some extent by his own engine, but apparently it was close enough to cause him to run down to a nearby highway in order to get out of the way.

Enginemen Klire, of train CU-2, thought that when his engine stopped on the passing siding, it was separated from the fouling point by a distance about equal to the length of the engine and one car; it was back far enough so that it cleared the insulated joints, because he said he looked back for that particular purpose and saw signal 1002 in the clear position. After train No. 102 had departed, he saw the head brakeman go to the telephone and then give him a signal to proceed, which he acknowledged with two short blasts on the whistle. The train started ahead, and when his engine was about over the frog of the switch, he glanced back and saw a headlight, remarking to Conductor Harrison, who was on the engine, that a train was coming. The conductor at once said that the approaching train was not going to stop, and Engineman Klire replied that it would stop, but on looking back again he realized that the conductor was correct, and he said he at once opened the throttle wide, in order to get the engine off the switch so as to avoid a side collision between the two engines. When the collision occurred, his

engine broke away from the train and ran some distance down the track, Enginemen Kline keeping the brake valve in the release position and the throttle open, so as to get as far away as possible from the point of accident. Engineman Kline further stated that it was the custom to depend on the flagman to provide protection when starting out of a passing siding. It was not the custom to call in the flagman when on a siding, but on the other hand, the engineman said the flagman would hear the whistling and know that his train was ready to proceed. In this particular case, the only whistle signals sounded by him were two short blasts in answer to the head brakeman's signals, and then two longer blasts to indicate that he was starting the train. Engineman Kline realized that with the spring switch in use at this point, he was not afforded any signal protection until his train moved over the insulated joints, whereas with a hand-operated switch he would have had it opened, causing the signals to assume the stop position, before starting the movement. The statements of Fireman Savage brought out nothing additional of importance.

Conductor Harrison, of train CU-2, said that after the train had started, Engineman Kline looked back and said there was a train coming on the straight track. The conductor then looked back, at which time his own engine was about on the frog of the switch, and told the engineman that the train was not going to stop, and he said Engineman Kline then remarked that he would try to get the engine far enough out on the main track so that it would not be struck by the approaching train. Conductor Harrison then got off the engine and began flagging the approaching train with his white lantern, but realizing that it was too late to avert an accident, he soon got out of the way. Conductor Harrison also stated that he had noticed signal 1002, both before and after train No. 102 passed it, and it was operating properly on both occasions, and he also saw it in the stop position after the accident had occurred. He admitted that a fusee should have been displayed for the purpose of protecting the head end of the train when it started to move. It further appeared from his statements that he did not think the whistle on his engine had been sounded loudly enough to be heard by the flagman, and that his flagman also told him the engine of train TJX-6 had passed the caboose before it started to move.

Flagman Donlin, of train CU-2, said he was on the ground a couple of car-lengths back of the caboose when he saw the headlight of train TJX-6. He watched the train as it approached, moving at a speed of 30 or 35 miles per hour, and said that the engine was about opposite his caboose when his own train started to move, and although he called to the engine crew, it was too late to attract their attention. He estimated that his own train moved a distance of four or five car-lengths before the accident occurred, and that the brakes on train TJX-6 were applied when about three-fourths of that train had passed his caboose. Flagman Donlin further stated that it was his practice to place torpedoes and a fusee on the main track when pulling out of a siding, this action being taken either when he is recalled, or when his train starts to move, but in this case he had not heard any whistle signals indicating that his train was about to start, and when it finally did start, it was too late to warn the engine crew of train TJX-6.

Engineman Murtha, of train TJX-6, said signal 1004 was in the clear position when he passed it, and that a clear indication was also displayed by signal 1003 when it first came in sight. When he was about 12 car-lengths from the signal, moving at a speed of 25 or 30 miles per hour, the signal went to the stop position, at which time he had started to sound the whistle signal for the highway crossing at Treichler. He at once applied the brakes in emergency, told the head brakeman and fireman to get off, and then got off himself, just before the collision occurred. Engineman Murtha had not noticed that there was a train on the passing siding until he heard the sound occasioned as his engine was passing it. It was his opinion that even if a fusee had been lighted at the head end of train CU-2, it would not have prevented the accident, although the resulting damage might have been lessened to some extent. The throwing of the switch, however, might have caused him to receive a caution indication at signal 1004, in which event the accident probably would not have occurred. Engineman Murtha did not notice anyone near the switch flagging him with a lantern. The statements of Fireman Maloney and Head Brakeman Cotsler, of train TJX-6, who were riding on the engine, and of Conductor Long and Flagman Stewart, who were riding in the caboose, brought out nothing additional of importance.

Train Dispatcher Anthony, who was on duty at the time of the accident, said some member of the crew of train CU-2 had called him on the telephone about 5.49 or 5.50 a.m., and that he told them to follow train No. 102 out of Treichler. The last report he had received concerning train TJX-6 was from Palmerton, which is 8.27 miles west of Treichler. Judging from this report, he did not expect that the train would reach Lockport before 6.02 or 6.04 a.m., and consequently he said nothing about it to the crew of train CU-2, as it was his intention to keep that train ahead of train TJX-6 on account of a fast freight connection at Allentown, and also as it is not the practice to inform crews about following movements, except on portions of the line where there are no automatic signals, the expectation being that movements will be properly protected according to the rules. Subsequently, however, Dispatcher Anthony said it was not the practice to give permission for a train to leave a passing siding with a following train so close behind it.

Operator Menden, on duty at Lockport, said train TJX-6 had a clear signal indication at signal 1004. The train passed his office at a speed of about 35 miles per hour, and he said he heard the air brakes being applied after the train had passed his office a distance of 20 or 30 car-lengths. Operator Menden did not know train CU-2 was going to follow train No. 102, and his first knowledge of anything wrong was received on the telephone after the accident had occurred.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by train CU-2 heading out on the main track without adequate flag protection.

The evidence indicated that after receiving permission to occupy the main track, train CU-2 was started immediately. Since the switch leaving the siding was a spring switch, which could be trailed through without operating the switch stand, it was not until the engine had fouled the track circuit that signal 1002 was caused to assume the stop position. This was the first warning received by the engine crew of train TJX-6, which apparently was close to the signal at the time it changed from proceed to stop, and although the engineman of that train at once applied the brakes in emergency, it was

too late to avert the accident. It also appeared from the evidence that train CU-2 did not begin to move until the engine of train TJX-6 was passing its caboose, and this in turn resulted in the inability of the flagmen of train CU-2 to warn the crew of train TJX-6. In making the movement from the passing siding out on the main track, it was absolutely necessary for the crew of train CU-2 to make sure that their train was furnished with adequate flag protection, the conductor and engine-men were together on the engine, and on them rests the responsibility for not providing such protection.

All of the employees involved were experienced men, and at the time of the accident none of them had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the hours of service law.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND

Director.